



LOYAL CITIZENS IN ACTION

AN ADDRESS

BY

HONORABLE J. HOWARD McGRATH

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

Prepared for Delivery

at

Dinner of

FIFTH NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

Hotel Statler

Washington, D. C.

Tuesday, May 23, 1950

7:00 P. M.

Dr. Flora, Distinguished Guests, Delegates and Members of the National Conference on Citizenship, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am most pleased with the privilege of participating in this historic Conference, and most grateful for the opportunity to speak on the subject of "Loyal Citizens in Action." Such a Conference as this gives inspiration, radiates confidence and reaffirms the faith of all Americans in the efficacy of our democratic system.

Growing out of the efforts of the Citizenship Committee of the National Education Association to discover what was being done in the field of citizenship and to coordinate the efforts of all organizations in the interest of effective American citizenship, these conferences have been held annually since May 17, 1946. They have proved their worth on the basis of the objectives already achieved.

In this connection I should like to pay a tribute to my predecessor in the office of Attorney General -- you, Mr. Justice Tom C. Clark, for your invaluable contributions to the success of these conferences from the very beginning. You have helped greatly, as you yourself have so aptly expressed it, to translate the American heritage into a dynamic reality for the common good." We are all deeply indebted to you.

Those in charge of these conferences have had the genius to label each with a significant motto. Your first conference, in Philadelphia in 1946, set the pattern; your Second Conference sounded the alarm; your Third Conference outlined the job for all interested in the maintenance of our democratic form of government; and last year you stressed the importance of awareness of our responsibilities as citizens of this great Republic. This year your theme is "Loyal Citizens in Action."

This year's theme is indeed in its proper logical sequence, because the goal you have set can only be achieved through action on the part of our citizens who are truly and sincerely loyal.

A conference such as this is a crystal clear manifestation of loyal citizenship in action. Constituted as it is, and representing the numerous and various outstanding civic, religious, educational, professional, industrial, labor and communications groups of the country, it is the voice of all our people and therefore can truly be called the workshop or laboratory of democracy.

During the last war our role in the world was emphasized as the arsenal of weapons to defend freedom in this world. Today we are not only the arsenal of such weapons, but we are also the arsenal of those moral and spiritual values which are the basic elements of a true democratic system of government.

The individual citizen, who is admittedly the strongest bulwark of our country's welfare, needs active strengthening from time to time; and this is accomplished by such conferences as these.

All of you have come here to achieve, in the words of President Truman:

" * * * a noble objective -- to seek the betterment of our country, to implement your Government's efforts for peace, to bring about freedom, justice and opportunity for our own people and for all mankind."

It is fitting that the Conference be conducted in connection with "I Am An American Day."

There is no more precious possession today that can accrue to any individual than that of United States citizenship. The enslaved people of

the world look upon our citizens as the guardians and the possessors of those moral, spiritual, political, economic and social values which alone can bring to them the peace and freedom they so sorely need and pray for.

Accordingly, loyal citizenship in action necessarily implies an effective participation in all activities required for the preservation of this precious asset, not only for our own good, but for the good of the world at large.

We in this country have demonstrated to the world that rights, privileges and immunities of citizens can be respected and protected regardless of nationality, racial or religious affiliations.

Yet, in the world today there is much chaos and confusion. Yes, too much. More than half the people are enslaved. Technological progress has narrowed the areas of the globe.

Today the forces of good and evil are waging a mortal struggle between freedom and slavery, between the concept of man as an inert thing and the certainty of man as an inviolate creature of God. We are living in a new era -- the Atomic Era. It is the function of loyal citizenship in action to recognize and meet the challenge that the free world is faced with today, for it is a real challenge.

Never before has our democratic system been as sorely tried as it is today by the false ideologies of totalitarian countries. These false doctrines find fertile field in the many spots on this earth where hunger exists and where disease is rampant. Tyranny is imposed on many in the name of democracy.

This threat to our system of Government is not only directed at us from abroad, but also from within. There are those who, though cloaked

in the guise of respectability and patriotism, have through inflammatory speech and malicious publications created disunity even amongst our own people. Paid "patriots" are flourishing as purveyors of hate. Consequently, it is incumbent upon every loyal citizen to become well informed as to all world events, all world threats to freedom, and all world efforts to eliminate such threats.

You probably have seen, or heard of some fantastic stories about the alleged infiltration into, or the "capture" of our Government and our country by Communists. If we weren't living in such an anxious period of the world's history, I would not even take time to mention it.

You may rest assured that the Federal law enforcement officers of your Government - the FBI and other official agencies charged with the responsibility for our internal security - are alert and active day and night. We know the Communists of the country, and we know of no Communists in the Federal Government today. And, if and when one is found, you may be sure that he will be swiftly dealt with.

However, I want to emphasize that while we are fully determined that there will be no Communists or other subversives in our Government, we are equally as determined that there will be no Gestapo witch hunts - that the basic civil rights of the individual will be securely protected and defended as guaranteed by the fundamental law of the land.

Our free America that we inherited must be handed down in like manner to the future generations.

A loyal citizen in action must also recognize that we have not yet achieved perfection in our own democratic process and that there is much yet to be done if we are to approach the ideal goal.

There is still in many parts of our country a wide gap between democracy in theory and democracy in action. Civil rights, precious as they are, are not yet fully enjoyed by all of our people. Our Bill of Rights has not as yet found full effectiveness in our daily lives and practices. "Citizen apathy," a grave citizenship problem, is not confined entirely to the voting booth.

Also, it is the duty of a loyal citizen in action to help "translate our Bill of Rights into a Bill of Responsibilities," for there is a vast difference between being just an American citizen and a responsible American citizen.

I should like to comment on some of those responsibilities, on those which to me seem of most importance.

Foremost, the loyal citizen in action must endeavor not only to accept citizenship responsibility, but must also make every possible effort to exercise that responsibility. It should always be remembered that freedom and democracy are never permanently secure; that eternal vigilance is still the only price of liberty, and that each generation must assume its burden of guarding that freedom.

It is incumbent upon all loyal citizens to see to it that our democratic forces always remain vigorous and meaningful and that our democratic system harbors no vulnerable spots.

To gain that, there are certain basic fundamentals which the loyal citizen in action must not only conform to, but actually practice.

It should be recognized that the present American way of life is the result of the interplay of the differences and characteristics of the various people who have come to our shores and effected a cross-fertilization

of the social, economic and political beliefs which they possessed with the new environment in this Western world.

All should ever remember that from its very beginning, American history is the continuous story of immigrants coming from older lands, arriving here with their inherited ideologies which they later modified, in the process adapting themselves to new conditions and new experiences.

The colonial settlers were immigrants who came to this hemisphere to live with others who were not of their own kin. People of diverse stock and of different viewpoints and experiences found the space for and the means of living together competitively, but in self-interest, as a United Nation.

In this country there is no aristocracy of race, of color, or of creed. The true American is the one who understands that the America of today is the result of the contribution of each and every constituent group, element, integrated in the make-up of our population and civilization.

We have blended into one great Nation without sacrificing the individual differences which made for what I like to call the "symphony of democracy." Like the soothing music of a symphony orchestra, produced by the harmonious tones of the various instruments playing in unison and under the leadership of one conductor, our democracy serves us best when it is a reflection of the harmonious activities of our many varied component groups acting pursuant to universally accepted basic democratic principles.

Over 120 different nationalities constitute our national populace. Each has much to contribute to the common cause, and each is respected because of such contribution.

An important function, then, of the **loyal** citizen in action is the recognition of the inalienable rights of every individual. The rights of every group must be respected, for any attack on the rights of any one group will eventually result in attacks upon others.

We often bespeak "toleration" of such groups. I, for one, prefer the word "respect," for the word "tolerance" somehow implies condescension. We should respect each other's views, each other's faiths, each other's creeds, regardless of color of skin, or religious or racial background. There may be disagreement; but "honest disagreement," in the apt words of my predecessor in office, "is one of democracy's strong cornerstones." There can be no disagreement in a totalitarian state. There is a close connection between democracy and truth; and there can be no truth if there is no freedom of expression. That is why we were able last week to celebrate the publication of the first volume of a projected 52-volume edition of the writings of Thomas Jefferson, who so classically expressed the fundamentals of a true democracy. Nowhere behind the Iron Curtain could such an event be possible.

It has been fittingly said that the freedom which we enjoy impels moral decency. It requires obedience and respect for our laws. Such obedience and respect in practice is an absolute essential of a loyal citizen in action. As chief law enforcement officer of the United States, I am disturbed by the prevalence and increase of crime within our own borders. The latest crime report compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation indicates that a serious crime is committed every eighteen seconds; that by the end of 1949, there were over 1,763,290 serious criminal offenses committed.

Indeed, crime was up four and one-half percent across the Nation during 1949, as compared with the previous year. This is an unhealthy trend, and must not only be halted, but must be substantially reversed.

A loyal citizen in action deems it his primary duty to observe all laws. Disrespect for the law is a devastating influence on the youth of our country.

It is shocking to learn that 31 percent of all persons committed to Federal prisons last year were in the age group between 18 and 24 years; and, what is even more disturbing is the fact that 70 percent of all first offenders brought to trial in the Federal courts for criminal offenses were from this age group. The crime problem of our country is essentially a youth problem. It may continue so until every adult in America -- and particularly every loyal citizen -- awakens to his responsibility and acts accordingly.

That is why I am delighted to note that this year for the first time youth has an expanded program at this Conference; for, as youth goes so will our country go. I have wrestled with the problem of juvenile delinquency, as has my predecessor. I do not know of any new law which Congress can enact which will diminish it to an appreciable degree. Basically the difficulty can only be solved through a process of moral training in the home, the church and the school. Organizations such as yours can help make such training possible.

Finally, loyal citizenship in action means strict adherence to the moral and spiritual principles which can only be achieved through love of God and through the teachings of our various religious faiths.

What the world needs today more than ever is an abundance of faith, hope and understanding. The loyal citizen in action must have an abiding faith in the ultimate triumph of the true democratic system; and he must have undying hope in a better future.

We must pray for the wisdom and vision to comprehend this complex world, and for the sagacity to discover the means of attaining brotherhood, not only for us of the present generation, but for our descendants in the future.

Only as loyal citizens in action can we reach the coveted goal; and -- with the aid of Divine Providence -- a greater, brighter and better America, and a world of peace and abundance will be achieved.